

Paul Pino

## Hartford's Piece of History

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### Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, is the oldest public art museum in the United States. This museum was founded by Daniel Wadsworth in 1842 and it has a rich tradition of firsts, leading the way in art collecting and embracing new art movements, the first American museum to acquire works by Caravaggio, Salvador Dali, Joan Miro, Piet Mondrian, Joseph Cornell, and many other artists.

The Wadsworth, as it is most commonly known, was constructed on the site of the family home of Daniel Wadsworth (1771–1848) in the heart of downtown Hartford. Its architects were Alexander Jackson Davis and Ithiel Town, who designed the "castle" that is the atheneum's oldest building. Construction began in 1842 after the museum was incorporated on June 1 of that year. While "1842" can be seen clearly above the building's name above the front doors, the museum itself did not open until July 31, 1844. It has been operating continuously since then. The Wadsworth family, being one of the oldest and most affluent in the city, contributed numerous valuable pieces of art to the museum to be displayed at the time the Atheneum opened. The first collection consisted of 78 paintings, two marble busts, one portrait miniature, and one bronze sculpture. The Wadsworth has also been utilized since its beginning as a place for dramatic and dance performances, exhibits of historical artifacts, social functions, and benefits.

The museum struggled financially in the decade before 2008 and went through five directors and three acting directors in that time. In fiscal year 2006, the museum had a deficit of about \$284,000, and in the 2007 fiscal year the deficit was \$540,000. In October 2007, the museum abandoned a planned expansion into the former Hartford Times building. The project, originally expected to cost \$16 million, was later estimated to cost \$19 million, with higher operating costs than originally expected.

The Wadsworth museum has a lot to offer to Hartford. Tourists come from all over the world to see works of art that are very valuable, which make Hartford a place to see. The more who come to the museum the more revenue that Hartford gains which is something that is needed in order for our city to thrive.

From personal experience, I can say it is a gem in the middle of Hartford. This is one of the best museums I have ever been to and is America's oldest public art museum. The first time I went to the Wadsworth I was amazed with the beauty of the building itself. From the outside the Wadsworth looks like a Medieval Castle. The inside is just as amazing with marbled floors and winding stair cases, ultra high ceilings, stained glass windows, and a section with a Tiffany stained glass ceiling. Alexander Calder is my favorite and the museum has the best collection of his work including the enormous orange Stegosaurus located just outside the building.

Through art we can see through the eyes of the artist and we can see what factors play into a piece of artwork they have made. Art is self-expression through paintings, drawings, music and other forms of artwork. So the factors that can shape an artist's view is feelings, events that might of even caused struggle, and the only way to release their anger, love, and misery is through art. A painting holds a thousand words and it serves as a gateway to how life once was or how it was through a particular artist's lifetime. Art exposes people to a whole new way of looking at something. I feel local Hartford school students should always have the opportunity to have this museum in order to expose them to liberal arts. If they see a work of art that interests them, it can inspire them to start drawing or painting.

The Hartford school system has changed so much since I was younger, this might not sound relevant but art in schools have changed. We had band and various art classes that we could choose from, but now we don't have the same amount of exposure. When I had art in school, it helped me think more vividly when it came to all other aspects of academics. Ever since the exposure to art my

grades improved back in my early grades it helped me to read faster as well as write. Now-a-days we don't have art or the exposure so the Wadsworth Atheneum could substitute that exposure.

In conclusion, Art is a great way of self-expression and it is something important that children should be exposed to. It opens many opportunities for students who have unique learning abilities and it shows them that art could be an outlet for them to get their point across. Art comes up daily in topics and art also brings the whole world together. Everything around us is an aspect of art because if the world didn't have art everything would be bland and nothing would be unique. "If we are all products of our environment, then Hartford should be full of art." – Paul Pino

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